DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 195 607 UD 020 985

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TITLE White Racists in America: We Have Met Them and They Are Us.
PUB DATE [73]
NOTE 37p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Black Stereotypes: *Negative Attitudes: *Racial Attitudes: *Racial Bias: *Racial Discrimination: *School Role: Slavery: Teacher Role: United States History

ABSTRACT

The atmosphere of racism in America affects the attitudes and behavior of both blacks and whites. Our racial outlook is profoundly influenced by the history of black slavery which dehumanized blacks and caused them to engage in behavior that could be used as "proof" of inferiority. Even today, a century after slavery was abolished, the doctrine of inferiority is reinforced by separating black people from our institutions and our lives. Much of the racism that blacks encounter in our society is unconscious but permeates daily life. A number of anecdotes provided in this paper illustrate the frequency of (often unconscious) racist attitudes and practices. The educational system itself perpetuates segregation, thus perpetuating the ideology and practices that supported slavery. Racism in the schools is illustrated by studies in which teachers were found to have false perceptions of black students' knowledge and learning abilities. In order to break the cycle of racist attitudes and behavior, individuals must become aware of the subtle ways that the cycle is reinforced by seemingly insignificant, often innocent individual decisions and actions. (Author/GC)

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WHITE RACISTS IN AMERICA: We Have Met Them and They Are Us

By William W. Wayson

The rise of the "third world" (or developing nations) in international politics indicates that racial tensions and conflicts may become a major part of life all over the globe. In America today the resolution of racial strife, which demands that black citizens achieve a more respected place in society, continues to be a major problem on the domestic scene. The Report of the National Commission on Civil Disorders (the Kerner Report) blamed much of the American strife on white racism and concluded that: "Discrimination and segregation have long permeated much of American life; they now threaten the future of every American."[1] Though the term "racist" grates harshly, we should not let it blind us to evidence that we are a people permeated with subtle racist ideas whose roots go deep into Western culture and history. There is not an American--white or black--who does not hold attitudes which are very detrimental to the resolution of racial problems. Malcolm X, in his Autobiography, described the situation in this manner:

> ...it isn't the American white man who is a racist, but it's the American political, economic, and social atmosphere that automatically nourishes a racist psychology in the white man.[2]

He should have stated that the atmosphere has affected black as well as white men so that it controls the behavior of both. Both breathe in the same atmosphere.[3] The American problem, though unique in its American forms, may reflect general principles that influence inter-racial conflicts in other parts of the world.

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The American atmosphere of racism may be understood only through an analysis of our history and economy, and an examination of the process through which unrecognized attitudes subtly influence everyday decisions and actions. Only through such understanding can we all come to see the part we play in destroying equality and freedom for black Americans. Only then can we accept the Kerner Report finding that:

> What white Americans have never fully understood--but what the Negro can never forget--is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it.[4]

We will never understand racism for what it is until we answer the basic question, "How can good people participate in such decisions and not be aware of doing so?" Everyday in churches, city governments, grocery stores, schools, families, and bridge clubs good people make decisions so pervaded by racial attitudes that they prevent the full citizenship to which black people aspire.

The Cultural Impact Of Slavery

Racial attitudes and behaviors in the United States are profoundly influenced by our history of black slavery. A nation can tolerate slavery only after its people have adopted attitudes that help them to live with slavery. The slave must be "broken" to accept his lot so that he presents no threat to the master. The master must rationalize the inhumanity of slavery so that he can live with it. Even those citizens

who do not have slaves must rationalize their standing mute, permitting other people to be enslaved. Slavery is institutionalized by eliminating the slave's aspirations for freedom and status and his claim to civilization while at the same time persuading the majority that the slave needs and appreciates the benefits of slavery.

Other countries that utilized slaves did not have to do all that America did to its slaves because their social philosophies did not accept the basic equality of men anyway; thus, they had less trouble rationalizing slavery. Consequently, their slave populations were less dehumanized and were assimilated more easily after slavery was abolished. Brazil is an outstanding example.

In North America the system dehumanized the slave and caused him to engage in behavior that could be used as "proof" of inferiority. The result was a cycle of self-fulfilling prophecies. After a while the process became self-perpetuating, and with little or no visible effort both slave and master and their parent society came to believe that the black slave truly was an inferior being.

The process illustrates on a massive scale a simple psychological principle. Children learn it early in life. Wives and husbands use it against one another all of the time. White Americans learn to use it against Negroes in ways that seem almost instinctive, and black Americans use it in their daily contacts with whites. The principle

is that one can and does force others to behave in ways that will prove what he thought about them all along.[6] If we believe another to be angry with us, we force him to behave in some way that proves to us that we were right. If one believes Blacks inferior, he forces Blacks to behave in ways that prove their inferiority, at least to his satisfaction. Furthermore, if the Black can be made to feel inferior, it becomes easier to force[7] him to behave so.

How was this principle applied to American society on such a scale that it dominated our history and perpetuates belief in black inferiority a century after slavery was abolished? Students of the history of slavery have documented the process.[8] The slave was taken from the African culture that he knew, then was brought into an alien culture about which he was taught very little. He came from a well-developed African civilization and was kept in a constant state of insecurity about the new culture into which he was forced. Only a person who has been a guest in a foreign home whose customs and language he did not understand can feel even a small part of the insecurity the imported slaves must have experienced.

The slave was made totally subservient to his master who had strong legal, social and physical sanctions to enforce demands. After taking residence on the master's land and in the master's quarters, the slave was prohibited from behaving in ways that Americans deemed human. He could not marry, and he could not take care of his family in the accustomed manner. His mate was used as a brood mare to

produce work animals; his children could be sold at the master's whim. His children were reared by women--it was the cheapest way to rear children to workable size while preventing slave father's from behaving as other men did.

The male slave was denied the external symbols of manhood. He had no freedom to seek new employment or better working conditions. He was not permitted to support a family. He was permitted no pursuit of self-interest and was prohibited from moving to new employment or new residence. The slave system effectively stamped out the assertiveness or agressiveness which characterizes males in most capitalistic societies. The Constitution counted him as three-fifths a man and the Supreme Court delivered the Dred Scott Decision which declared him legally a piece of property without citizen rights.

The slave was denied an education; in many places it was illegal to educate Negroes. Louisa May Alcott's father lost his job in Washington, D.C., because he taught Negroes in his classroom. Philo Stewart lost jobs in Washington and then in Cincinnati, Ohio, for educating Negroes before someone gave him capital for founding Oberlin College to which he admitted two oppressed populations--Negroes and women. Connecticut citizens burned Prudence Crandall's home because she was teaching black girls there. Even at the present time black students are provided inferior education in segregated schools in the South and in large cities throughout the nation.[9]

Cut off from their past, possessing no recorded heritage, and denied education in American customs, enslaved Negroes were forced to develop a folk culture that until very recently was considered too emotional and earthy to be "civilized." Negro churches still bear the plantation stamp of poverty, ignorance and primitiveness. Whites and even middle-class Blacks often consider worship there undisciplined, undignified, and embarrassingly emotional. Negro music and dancing were blends of dimly-remembered Africa with lower-status American frontier themes and rhythms, which only recently has been admitted into "polite" society.[10] Black culture, forced into its own unique mold, has come to be so much a part of the Negroes' life in America that it is seen as a "natural" rather than a forced phenomenon: Blacks are commonly believed to be naturally sexy, emotional, rhythmic, violent and undisciplined. Until very recently those stereotypes often were reinforced by literature, newspapers, radio, television, and movies in both documentary and entertaining forms.[11]

In other aspects of life, Blacks may be seen as imitating, rather than fully participating in, the predominant culture. It is still entertainment to see a Negro wedding in which the woman wears a white gown and has a ring bearer and several attendants. Many whites view the event as a caricature like the silly little child weddings that used to be put on to raise money for the P.T.A. Many view the Black

Miss America pageant or even Black gangsters as imitations or caricatures of the "real" thing.

In short, the Americans adapted to slavery by depriving the slave of behaviors that exhibited pride and will and ambition. It was done so well and started so early in the black child's life that everyone, often even the black man, came to feel that the behavior was natural or innate. Once the cycle started, the Black behaved in ways that proved what was said about him. Institutionalized behavior also reflected and reinforced stereotypes. Churches, schools, laws, governments all taught the doctrine of racial inferiority--more by their actions than their words (though there is much evidence of direct verbal racism also).

Even today, a century after slavery was abolished, the doctrine is reinforced by separating black people from our institutions and our lives. We set them apart from our neighborhoods and shopping areas; set them apart in our schools and our churches; eliminate them from textbooks[12]; and until 1965 we often separated their toilets, parks, theater seats, drinking fountains, and public accommodations--so that neither we nor they ever have an opportunity to see that they often behave differently from what we want to believe. The process of dehumanization has outlasted slavery. Neither in 1865 nor in 1965 was anyone able to stop the cycle that had become an American way of life. Although the cycle was originated to support a slave economy, the attitudes were easily translated to support a poverty-based,

share-cropper economy and later a poverty-based urban economy.[13] It is a cycle that is extremely difficult to break because it is so subtly ingrained throughout our society. Even today it causes all of us to relate to other races through attitudes, perceptions and values that are systematically harmful to Blacks. Those relationships are the substance of "institutionalized racism[14]" which inhibits our resolving the great domestic problems posed by the stresses of urbanizing a formerly rural society that now is possessed of unprecedented wealth. Senator Ribicoff, writing in Look (September 8, 1970), succinctly described how open racism and deeper patterns of behavior are related:

> Northern segregation may not be traceable to one official action. But the thousands of individual decisions--by school boards, real estate brokers, businessmen, politicians, and private citizens--that created de facto segregation were all based on the same objective as the official de jure action: to keep blacks and whites separate...

Today few people maliciously perpetuate the racist cycle, though there are still some vicious and overt bigots around. Rather most who perpetuate it do so out of sincere conviction that they are right and good and sometimes even true and beautiful. There is no irrepressible corps of open racists who resist equal opportunity for Negroes. On the contrary, good, ordinary people stand in the way as they go about their daily, routine duties. These good people more often than not are unaware of the harm they do, for so often their actions grow from a fertile blend of self-interest and social good, germinated by the

warm sun of past experience and the gentle rain of public approval. This conspiracy of the good is sustained by the ideology that evolved from the racism of slavery. That ideology provides rationalizations that make each person believe that his behavior is right, is good, is prudent, is necessary. Consequently, racism is so pervasive and so difficult to eradicate because good people perpetuate it and feel right about doing so. Racism is not sustained by the man who murdered Martin Luther King, nor by the Ku Klux Klan, nor by George Wallace, nor by other overt bigots. It is strengthened by the daily practice of thousands of citizens who are mindless of the extent to which prejudice subtly influences them. It is our silence, our subtlety, our sincerity, our benevolent countenances, our sublime and blinding mindlessness that keep the cycle of racism operative.

At this point we should make it clear that the process we are emphasizing is not uniquely American, nor are its effects observable only among American Blacks. One may see it in every circumstance where one group of people is systematically discriminated against within a predominant society. Indeed when describing the phenomenon as it affects poor whites we may substitute the term "institutionalized placism" for"racism" and do little harm to the discussion. One may see the process at work in colonial nations, among lower-socio-economic groups wherever they exist, and among such groups as the French in Canada, Italians and Poles in some Western cities, Maori in New Zealand,

the Pakistani in Great Britain, American Indians in the American West or Untouchables in India. The original purposes for beginning the cycle differ, of course, from those in the American instance and the means for perpetuating the cycle may differ according to various cultural imperatives. Nevertheless, the psychological and sociological processes seem to be similar and the stereotypes of inferiority appear amazingly uniform (e.g. laziness, uncleanliness, dishonesty, emotionality) whatever group is being discussed. The key to the process, of course, is that a set of stereotypes (which may be largely mythical) are reinforced by institutionalized behaviors in a manner that makes repetitive discrimination appear normal and acceptable to ordinary citizens as they go about their daily affairs.

One needs not look far in American life to find examples of how ordinary citizens deny black Americans their proper share of American life. The point is best illustrated by cases that I have drawn from direct personal experience in typical American communities.

"It's No Sin Being Black, But It's Mighty Inconvenient."

From birth on in every life situation, the American sees discriminatory actions. The white child comes to accept it as the natural order of things, is blinded to it, and in his adult life isolates himself from it so that he comes to believe that it does not exist. The black child encounters it in countless interactions from the hospital maternity ward to which his mother is assigned because she cannot afford private rooms to the (informally) segregated funeral parlors. He cannot enter his world at any point which is not filled with potential humiliation

and opposition. The following true stories illustrate racism as it appears in myriad encounters:

In a neighborhood where Blacks are moving in, a grocery has both front and back entrances. One day several black teenagers walked straight through, doing nothing more than chatting with one another. After they left, the owner called to his cashier, "Did you see how they behaved? They are like that every time they come in here. You have to watch them all the time."

A visitor walked with me through an inner-city school. We passed three kindergartners acrobatically and skillfully walking on their hands in the hallway. The children smiled up and said, "Hi, Dr. Wayson." I greeted them and passed by. The visitor waited until we reached the end of the hall before asking, "Are you really going to let them fight like that without doing anything?"

My wife and I drove into the parking area at a small grocery in a suburban residential area. Three teenage boys, dressed well and behaving as gentlemen, walked past the car. My wife echoed my thoughts, "We had better lock the car." We turned to one another immediately as she asked "I wonder what made me say that?" I admitted my thoughts and said, "It had to be because those boys were black." There could have been no other reason; we would never have locked the car in that neighborhood under any other circumstances.

A Public Library in our city refused to give a library card to a black pupil and warned the teacher, "Be sure to come back with them when they come again."

I spoke at an event conducted by a man who introduced himself as the person who made decisions about what news could be broadcast over one of the local stations. He revealed himself to be rather conservative, and asserted that he had thrown a Civil Rights leader out of his office. Asked whether it wouldn't be wise for the public to be able to get both sides of racial issues, he interrupted with this answer, "No, no, not at all, You would just encourage the radicals that way."

On the day after the assassination of Martin Luther King a very intelligent and liberal man assured me that he had seen six hundred Negro youngsters looting the stores on the main street. Upon direct questioning he avowed that he had seen it. No such incidents occurred that day in our city. If he saw anything at all, it probably was a group of black children from a local elementary school on their way to a memorial service.

After moving from Illinois to New York state, my wife and I had to pass a test to get new drivers' licenses. Accompanied by an inspector, we drove around the designated course. At an intersection we stopped to avoid hitting a car that ran through a stop sign. Without looking to see who was driving, the inspector said, "I bet it was a nigger. We have the same problem with every one of them but you don't dare flunk one of them or they will say you are prejudiced."

A receptionist we know is twenty-one years old; she's an excellent worker; she's married and keeps a fine home. She went into a shop to exchange a dress and purchase another. The clerk took the exchange, wrapped the new dress and then presented a bill that reflected no credit for the return. Our friend, thinking the clerk had made a mistake, asked that the item be subtracted. The clerk said that it had been. As the discussion progressed, the manager came over and defended the clerk. He tried to end the conversation with the words, "I don't know what's the matter with you people. We have this trouble with you all the time."

A black dentist and his wife were looking for a $50,000 home, which in 1968 was considered an expensive residence. His income was quite enough to support the purchase. While they were shopping, a lady crouched down behind her piano so they would not know she was available to show them her home. That was humiliating, but the worst humiliation of all was that one of their personal friends, a white real estate agent, told them the house was sold when it was not. Later, another agent offered to get them "a $90,000 home for less" if they "wanted to buy it quickly." They found that it had been advertised for several months at a price of $50,000.

In 1973, the city council in a suburb outside the capital of Ohio passed a law making it illegal to discriminate against Negroes while selling a home, but they also passed a law which prevented anyone from checking to see whether discrimination had occurred!

Just after that suburb outlawed discriminatory real estate practices, the leading realtor announced that his agency would no longer post "For Sale" signs in that suburb because his agency wanted to contribute to the beauty of the community by preventing clutter.

While a suburban school board was trying to understand the concept of the power structure (that is a group of people who have disproportionate power in a community), one member exclaimed, "Oh, I know who they are; they are the ones who build shopping centers and keep Negroes out of our town."

As I waited to pick up a pizza for a Saturday snack, the proprietor and I discussed whether he had a right to judge all Negro people by the actions of a few. He pointed at me and shouted, "If they were good people they wouldn't be living in the conditions they do. Now ponder that while you contemplate your theories!"

Such stories show that negative racial attitudes tinge many facets of our lives, and the pizza-maker's argument demonstrates the circularity of popular thinking about black people. The attitudes are sustained not only by individual actions, but by the way individuals behave in institutional roles on school boards, on city councils, and in real-estate agencies.[15] Now, we shall examine two institutions that are often thought to be eliminating prejudice and injustice--churches and schools.

Love Thy Neighbor As Thyself"

Some clerics and theologians--are beginning to realize that

churches have taught and reinforced many of the prejudices that plague our society. Studies report that the more often people go to church, the more biased and prejudiced they are.[16] Much of the racial superiority learned during church services passes unnoticed because blacks and whites have been segregated from one another in their chapels, and the words of pious brotherhood have obscured deeds of righteous bigotry.[17]

We can observe subtle racism among both clerics and churchgoers as they engage in church-related activities. One can see how those acts manifest the Church's approval of discrimination, no matter what it may be saying. Though church approval for racist actions in America is far more subtle than that which we believe to sustain religious antagonisms in Northern Ireland, the subtler approval is no less supportive of grave and destructive social tensions.

The Board of a prominent church that decided to stay downtown but to serve suburban citizens voted not to hire a neighborhood resident to be a janitor because "he might be Negro."

An elder who proposed opening his church to black residents in the neighborhood was treated to the argument that the church could not declare open membership because "it would let in a lot of riff-raff."

The wife of the pastor of the largest downtown church in our city assured me that her church was open to Blacks, but there were none there because "they do not want to come into it." She confessed that she did not know the location of the largest public housing

project serving poor black families, though it was only five blocks from her church. She and her husband had been in the city for seventeen years.

The Catholic churches in our city sponsored several seminars on racial discrimination. One participant said that he did not want Negroes to live next to him because they might drink and carouse. He admitted that he wouldn't ask that question about any white man. Furthermore, he conceded having a white neighbor who did drink and carouse. As he lost ground in the argument, he blurted out, "The church has not said that my feelings are immoral for forty years and it will have a hell of a time convincing me differently now."

In America much of the resistance to Negroes is justified on the basis of protecting property rights. In a smalltown church in Ohio, in the summer of 1969, a visiting minister held up the Bible and proclaimed, "The highest value in the New Testament is the right of property."

"They Can't Take Your Education Away, Boy"

Schools in America are commonly thought to provide a means for every child to advance himself. "Getting an education" has been accepted as a ticket to more income, better housing and greater prestige. Even the poor hold a naive belief that those who have an education have answers to everything, as one black mother told me, "I don't know how to solve the problem of my son's misbehavior, but if I had a bachelor's degree, I would." Much of the social legislation during

the 1960's assumed that schools would be instruments of social mobility for Black children to gain an equal part of the American dream. But one does not have to be clairvoyant to see that racism subtly retards the black stride toward freedom in the world of desks and chalkdust. Here, too, the cycle intrudes.

In a high school in a well-to-do suburb (whose students graduate to enter influential professional occupations), the teachers were discussing a pamphlet that purported to show that Negroes were inferior in intelligence. One teacher spoke authoritatively, "It's about time someone showed that is true." There was not one word of disagreement.

Because a large number of Black families were moving into a local neighborhood, the elementary school was experiencing a number of problems for which its staff was not prepared. I offered to work with the principal to meet some of the challenges. While politely refusing any help, the lady who had been chosen the city's Educator-of-the-year, repeated several times, "Of course, the new children do not have the basic intelligence to take advantage of a quality program."

A mother from the parent group in a local school called a friend to ask whether his children, both models of middle-class virtues, would pose for pictures to publicize the school's holiday program. The friend offered that his children had many opportunities to be in the paper or to appear before the public. He suggested choosing some Negro children to have their pictures in the paper to make them

feel more proud of the school. The answer; "I think that children whose parents support the schools should be the ones who get the publicity."

In 1963, the Commissioner of Education of the State of New York declared that it was state policy to eliminate racial imbalance in all state schools because of the inherently inferior nature of segregated schools. On the day the declaration was published, staff members in a large high school were discussing the announcement. Though almost all their students were black, it was evident that these teachers opposed integration. One declared that he would move to the suburbs if the Commissioner ever tried to force his children to go to school with Negroes. Another said: "He ought to have to teach some of the little bastards."

In 1963 while studying several elementary schools, researchers called two of them "segregated" because they served over 90% Negro children. While previewing the report, principals of the two schools insisted that the label be removed. Their argument was not that the schools did not serve predominately Negro population but "If you call them segregated, it will mean that the Blacks are right." The director of the study commented that he did not want to hurt the school system and the word was stricken from the report.

A prominent suburban school superintendent and the director of a federally-financed educational agency both opposed developing curriculum materials teaching Black history. They felt Black history

was untrue, and asserted that it was an insidious attempt to "rewrite history like the Russians did."

A lovely mother (whose children were not involved) opposed voluntary integration in one city school by arguing in a public hearing that, "We have a terrible problem of air pollution, so we should stop running those busses in and out of that school."

A school teacher gave a common answer to why Negro children can't read when she said, "It's the kid's fault; he doesn't want to learn."

In 1971, a professor in an influential teacher-training College in a prominent University showed me a vocabulary-development exercise she was teaching a group of student teachers. Inasmuch as they were working with Negro children, I suggested she substitute pictures of Black people for the ones she was using. She responded somewhat defensively, "I don't think the School Board would let us do that."

The State School Board in a midwestern state was holding public hearings prior to enacting a ruling to require schools to keep students in classes for six hours a day. Though it was unstated, much impetus for the ruling had come from a fear of having Black adolescents "on the street". While debating a witness's testimony one member of the Board asserted, "Most of us at this table are employers and we want the schools of this state to produce employees who will do what employers want them to do."

At a recent meeting at which some principals were trying to convince some of their colleagues that more needed to be done to improve school life for Black children, a spokesman for the majority argued "You cannot hold us responsible for what has happened to children in this city; we have always done what the School Board has told us to do."

The stories told here reveal miseducational attitudes among professional educators who have great influence upon the future of Black children. Those attitudes reflect themselves in actions such as lesson-planning, disciplining, occupational guidance, and extracurricular activities. On a larger scale they underlie decisions about teacher selection and transfer,[18] textbook choices,[19] pupil assignment,[20] distribution of resources[21] and community relationships.[22] Still more children are harmed by curriculum policies, selection of administrative personnel, teacher contract negotiations, and state and federal legislation and regulation. When such negative attitudes undergird behaviors that systematically harm Black students in ways that influence their later participation in society, they are a part of the cycle of racism that we are discussing.[23] They perpetuate for at least another generation the ideology and practice that originally perpetuated slavery. It is doubtful that the cycle can be broken so long as such attitudes and behaviors characterize daily relationships in schools.[24]

Some Results of the Process

One way to understand the circularity of the forces in which disadvantaged populations are entangled is to envision how experiences at one point in life relate to other points more distant in time or space. A seemingly small force--say, a teacher's perception that the student cannot learn--takes on greater significance if we comprehend how educational opportunities help to determine the type of occupation taken after graduation. Occupation, in turn, has much to do with how much income one earns, and income determines the type of home one can afford and in what sort of neighborhood. Particular social and cultural services are available to residents of that neighborhood, and the quality of schooling differs systematically among neighborhoods. All of those factors, of course, bear upon the type of marriage that is contracted to start the next generation. Though the relationships are not perfect, they are highly interrelated in America. For example, educational achievement differences between groups seem to be more closely related to family income than to any other variable.[25]

While the full range of those relationships cannot be examined here, it may be useful to view some educational variables to see how they might affect the future for black children.

Some lower-status children begin school without many of the skills and insights that teachers expect as the natural equipment of every American child. Because teachers assume all students to have such

skills, instruction often proceeds as though the disadvantaged child does; consequently, he is treated to many lessons which, for him, are conducted in an incomprehendable idiom. He may be labelled a slow-learner and assumed unintelligent when, in fact, he simply cannot understand the teacher's terminology. However, because the teachers' assumptions blind them to contrary evidence, his lack of comprehension usually is not discovered or is discovered so late in his school career that irretrievable harm has been done to his academic career.

The results of a study that compared the listening vocabularies at the end of the kindergarten year among children from two ghetto schools with that of children from a solidly middle-class school are shown in Table I. The study essentially was to determine whether the children could associate concrete objects with words that teachers and instructional materials commonly use. Because concrete objects would be bulky to handle and difficult to administer in individual interviews with many children, we used the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test which contains 150 sets of four line drawings, one of which the child is asked to point out after a word is spoken. For example, plate seven shows pictures of a boat, a flag, a stove, and a clown. The child is asked to "Show me the clown," and he points to one of the pictures. The Table shows the range and mean correct responses given by children in the three schools, and clearly shows that the average child in the middle-class schools knew more of the words than did the average disadvantaged child.

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF CORRECT RESPONSES GIVEN BY KINDERGARTEN PUPILS IN TWO SCHOOLS SERVING A DISADVANTAGED AREA AND ONE SCHOOL IN A MIDDLE-CLASS AREA

School	Number of correct responses on Peabody Vocabulary			
	Range		Mean	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Disadvantaged black 28 boys, 29 girls	20-79[a]	15-60	48	47
Disadvantaged black 25 boys, 26 girls	29-70[b]	20-57	45	45
Middle-class white 23 boys, 28 girls	53-74	47-83	60	61

[a] The high score for boys here was quite atypical. The second highest score was 55.

[b] The high score for boys here was atypical. The second highest score was 66 and the third, 55.

For purposes of the present discussion, the findings are even more dramatic if we look at the actual words that were missed. Table II, shows what percentage of the children from the two types of schools missed selected words from the test.

This study examined only listening vocabulary (and not reading, writing, or speaking vocabularies); however, the differences are indicative of language difficulties in the other media. The results clearly demonstrate the difficulties that these black children have in comparison with middle-class children. For example, notice the greater percentages who could not associate spoken words with pictures of items that are commonly assumed to be a part of the everyday experience of children in our society--leaf, fence, bat, and bush were meaningless to some of the children. Even more of them could not point to pictures illustrating words like building (the verb), accident, nest, caboose, envelope, and badge which appear frequently in common parlance between teachers and pupils in kindergartens and first grades. After that many of the disadvantaged children stopped trying, but even among those who continued, large percentages could not identify pictures illustrating such words as net, eagle, shining, yawning, submarine, and group. If we consider how often these words are used in the classroom we can begin to project what great academic losses may originate in simple lack of familiarity with the vocabulary that teachers use. This simple and

TABLE 11

PERCENTAGES[a] OF KINDERGARTEN CHILDREN WHO COULD NOT ASSOCIATE SPOKEN WORDS WITH PICTURES

From Peabody Test Form A Item	Word	Children in Disadvantaged Area		Children in Middle-Class Area	
		Boys N=53	Girls 55	Boys 23	Girls 28
		%	%	%	%
1.	leaf	3.8	3.6	---	---
2.	fence	5.7	12.7	---	---
3	bat	3.8	7.3	---	---
4.	bush	7.6	14.6	---	---
5.	building	18.9	20.0	---	7.1
6.	accident	9.4	14.6	---	---
7.	nest	15.1	16.4	---	---
8.	caboose	34.0	41.8	---	---
9.	envelope	13.2	12.7	---	---
10.	picking	41.5	30.9	17.4	3.6
11.	badge	15.1	29.1	---	3.6
12.	coach	39.6	41.8	4.4	10.7
13.	net	11.3	7.3	---	---
14.	freckle	54.7	47.3	---	---
15.	eagle	11.3	9.1	---	---
16.	twist	22.6	12.7	---	3.6
17.	shining	22.6	16.4	---	3.6
18.	dial	41.5	36.4	---	---
19.	yawning	45.3	29.1	4.4	---
20.	tumble	30.2	27.3	4.4	3.6
21.	signal	41.5	56.4	---	7.1
22.	submarine	26.4	23.6	---	7.1
23.	projector	11.3	21.8	4.4	3.6
24.	group	58.5	50.9	17.4	17.9
25.	tackling	28.3	45.5	---	17.9

[a] The percentages shown are the percentages of the students who tried the word. About half of the disadvantaged youngsters had quit the test at item fifty; thus, the percentages from about item thirty on would be greater than shown, had all pupils tried the words.

innocent ignorance often is seen as lack of intelligence, and the child's frustration often leads to behavior that is interpreted as proof that he is unteachable or emotionally disturbed.

Of course, teachers were surprised by these results. It was the end of the kindergarten year; they had known and worked with the children for nine months. They insisted that the words had "been covered" in their instruction--and undoubtedly they had. But the coverage may as well have been done in a foreign language for many of their pupils, if we can believe the results of this study. Instruction for the child who does not know the words must begin with a careful examination of the teachers' assumptions about what he knows, and a willingness to set aside what we think he knows or should know in order to adapt our personal communication to what he does know. There is much evidence that lower-status black children learn quickly from concrete experiences and that while many know and use the same vocabulary used by their teachers, some use a different vocabulary to comprehend and organize thoughts about experiences.[26] For those who do not share the school's language, formal education often takes place in a language that is foreign. Such children develop no functional facility with that language until about fourth grade, by which time the school is loathe to adapt to his lack of skills and the behaviors with which he has learned to cope with the alien environment. Thus, the originally simple vocabulary differences lead to more ominous

contrarieties which are accelerated by behaviors that support the child's and the school's mutually self-fulfilling expectations about themselves and the other.

The discussion above has concerned itself with learning problems that result from teachers predicting incorrectly that a child can understand certain words when in actuality he cannot. We have no evidence to present here to show what harm is done when the educator believes that the child cannot understand and acts upon that belief when in fact the child can. In all probability, the lack of vocabulary exhibited by some children in the study corroborated a belief on the part of some instructors that none of the children could learn. To the extent that such occurred, the vicious cycle of racism was sustained.

Destructive stereotypes may be sustained by more than simple vocabulary differences, but also by a lack of concepts that are thought to be thoroughly ingrained in every child's experience. The data in Table III show that some poor black children do not know "facts" that are often taken for granted in schools. The data were collected in individual interviews from 77 children of third grade age, 72 children of fourth-grade age, 67 of fifth and 56 of sixth-grade age all from the same lower-status black community, attending a uniquely integrated school with a highly innovative humanistic style of operating.[27] The data were not collected for research purposes but to enable teachers and other staff members to get an accurate appraisal of each individual

child's knowledge about facts that are taken for granted in many school activities and to prevent generalizing one child's lack of knowledge to all of the children.

The information is useful for the present discussion in two ways. First, it shows that many children did know the facts; thus, it nullifies the stereotype that "all those children" are lacking basic knowledge. Second, it points out that teachers cannot assume that all children know utilitarian facts. If instructions are given, or information transmitted, or questions asked which assume that a child knows such elemental facts as the names of the months, or the number of days in a week, and he does not, his responses will convince teachers that he is stupid or that he is unable to learn especially if they are predisposed to feel that he is deficient anyway. Even minimal effort to assess whether a child knows such things and to teach them if he does not will do much to expunge both the child's feelings of inability and the teacher's stereotypes. The data show that larger percentages of sixth graders knew the information; consequently, there can be little doubt that the children <u>can</u> learn it and no need to assume them to be deficient in anything except the specific knowledge of particular information that undergirds much of what they are expected to know in school and in later life.

TABLE III

PER CENT OF DISADVANTAGED BLACK CHILDREN, GRADES 3-6,
WHO CORRECTLY RESPONDED TO "COMMON KNOWLEDGE" QUESTIONS

Question	Correct Responses: Total Sample = 235 No.	%	Sixth Grade = 56 No.	%
When is your birthday?	184	77	54	96
What year were you born?	95	35	38	67
How tall are you? (± 6 in.)	33	12	10	17
How much do you weigh? (± 10)	177	65	44	79
Name a yardstick[a]	95	35	26	46
Name the minute hand[a]	37	13	16	29
Name the hour hand[a]	43	16	20	35
Estimate time of day (± 2 hrs.)	186	78	54	96
Read the time on the hour[b]	140	51	41	74
Time to the five minute[b]	90	33	24	43
Time to the minute[b]	26	10	7	13
Construct time on hour[b]	205	75	49	87
Construct time on minute[b]	59	22	16	29
Draw a four inch line[c]	125	46	34	60
Name day of week for Oct. 7th[d]	165	61	45	81
Read date of 3rd Sun. in Oct.[d]	108	40	37	66
How many days in week?	168	62	49	87
Name days of week	191	70	50	90
How many months in year?	112	41	38	67
Name the months of year	59	22	24	43
How many hours in day?	125	46	52	92

a Given a real yardstick and clock face.
b Using a clock face with movable hands.
c Using a ruler
d Given a calendar.

But impersonal statistics tell only part of the story. Furthermore, they can lead to a continuation of the destructive cycle of inter-racial prejudice precisely because they are so impersonal. Few of us ever have to see the humiliation, anguish, and hurt caused by our unthinking action. If we could, we might change our contributions to race hatred and violence and to personal and racial degradation. These last two stories illustrate the American racist cycle and its pathetic impact upon successive generations of innocent victims:

I took a mother and fourteen children for a drive. They weren't all hers, we just picked them up from around the neighborhood. Four of those children were under six years of age and all four were sucking their thumbs. I started kidding them about it. One of the little boys solemnly and wholly seriously announced his intention to continue sucking as he informed me, "It's the way to make it white."

Several years ago I witnessed a kindergarten youngster, five years old, admiring a white visitor's hand and saying, "You have a beautiful hand and I love to feel it." She told him that his hands were beautiful too. That five-year-old child held his hands up, stared intently at the palms, and declared, "I hate these hands. I'd like to cut them off and burn them because they're black."

So Now to Break the Cycle

Sucking fingers does not make them white, and hating hands or even cutting them off does not obliterate a child's being himself.

What has to be obliterated is the set of forces that make it necessary for a child to resent being black. Those forces in America originate in fallacious racial stereotypes originally set up to defend slavery. Those stereotypes have become so thoroughly ingrained in our culture that it is easy to see them as hereditary. Many inbred racial and racist behaviors seem inborn and now sustain the stereotypes in such a way that they become self-fulfilling prophecies. These behaviors reflect themselves in personal decisions within institutional settings; consequently, the major social institutions exert systematic pressures which subtly deter Blacks and reinforce racism. Recent experiences in England indicate that similar discriminatory practices are supporting racial tensions there[28]; consequently, our attempts to obliterate racism may have international utility.

We must break the cycle of racist attitudes and behavior. There is no way to break such an ingrained part of a large society and culture unless many people become aware of the cycle and the subtle way that they and their institutions reinforce it. Each of those enlightened people can become a check against racist actions in themselves, their acquaintances, and their institutions. A successful war against racism requires merely that we risk hurting the feelings of those friends and acquaintances whose acts of commission and omission help to perpetuate the concept of Negro inferiority. Each of us can help others see racist consequences

of acts in which they see no harm, and we can refuse to reinforce racist behaviors by our own silence, acquiescence, or action. The end of racism can be hastened only by people who see that the System which is so destructive to Blacks is an accumulation of seemingly insignificant, often innocent individual decisions and actions.

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6. The self-fulfilling hypothesis occurs in many types of personal relationships and is discussed in such works as Bach, G.R. & Wyden, P. The Intimate Enemy: How to Fight Fair in Love and Marriage. New York: Avon Books, 1969. Berne, E. Games People Play. New York: Ballantine Books, 1973. And Rosenthal, R. & Jacobson, L. Pygmalion in the Classroom. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968. The cycle affecting race relations is analyzed best in Allport. G. The Nature of Prejudice. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc. 1958.

7. Some audiences object to the term "force" and would prefer, instead, terms such as "influence" or "attempt". My own observation is that the process often is so designed (however unconsciously) and so vigorous as to leave the other little if any choice (whether he is aware or not). In other instances the perceiver obstinately maintains his concepts even when objective evidence seems overwhelming. In either case, no less a word than "force" describes what actually occurs.

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